

Table 4.6. Summary Comparison of Management Objectives, Actions, and Strategies by Alternative Proposed in the Conte Refuge CCP

	<b>Alternative A Current Management (No change from 1995 FEIS, as amended)</b>	<b>Alternative B Consolidated Stewardship (Within Existing, Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative C Enhanced Conservation Connections and Partnerships (Service-preferred Alternative) (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative D Reduced Management with Emphasis on Backcountry Recreation (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	
<b>Management Framework</b>	<p>Alternative A represents our current management, as described in the 1995 FEIS for the refuge, as well as subsequent management direction outlined in EAs.</p> <p>Under alternative A, we would continue to manage existing refuge lands for native wildlife and fish and continue to acquire new refuge lands in SFAs, scattered rare species sites, and important, scarce and vulnerable wetlands delineated in the 1995 FEIS, as amended. The primary objective is to protect habitat for species listed in the refuge's purposes, including federally and State-listed threatened and endangered species.</p> <p>We would also continue to offer our existing level of public use and work with partners to achieve common goals throughout the watershed.</p>	<p>Our habitat management and public use programs would be very similar under alternatives B and C. The primary difference is the larger land base under alternative C, essentially doubling the area within which we would enhance and expand these programs. Under both alternatives we would focus on providing and enhancing habitat for migratory birds, fish, and other native wildlife; using SHC to address landscape-scale issues, such as climate change; emphasizing connections between conserved lands and recreational opportunities; and expanding opportunities for priority public uses.</p> <p>We would also continue to work with partners across the watershed, but prioritize where in the watershed we would focus our resources by creating Conservation Partnership Areas (CPAs; see below) that represent areas we think are most important for achieving the Service and Refuge System missions and refuge purposes and goals.</p> <p>Both alternatives B and C introduce the concept of Conservation Focus Areas (CFAs; see below). These are areas within CPAs that have high resource values for Federal trust resources and where we propose to acquire land for the refuge in fee, conservation easement, or through a cooperative agreement. Instead of the small, scattered SFAs under alternative A, the acres in CFAs are grouped into fewer, larger, contiguous blocks to provide more connected habitat. As compared with alternatives A and B, alternative C proposes to expand the approved refuge boundary by 99,957 acres. The proposed expansion would focus on protecting and conserving larger, contiguous blocks of habitat and providing habitat connectivity between conserved lands.</p> <p>Since we are proposing a greater refuge expansion under alternative C, there would be more public use opportunities (e.g., more acres open to hunting, more trails, etc.) and more habitat acres than in alternative B. New infrastructure would be provided to encourage access for people of all abilities, such as trails and trailheads, parking lots, interpretive signage, etc.</p>	<p>Under alternative D, we would focus on allowing natural processes to proceed with minimal management intervention.</p> <p>We would also focus on offering priority public uses that provide a more "back-country" experience. Public use infrastructure would be limited to trailhead information signs, narrower, less developed trails, and smaller parking lots.</p> <p>Alternative D would introduce the same CPA and CFA concept as alternatives B and C, but proposes the largest refuge expansion. The additional proposed acres would focus on making connections between conserved areas to create wildlife migration corridors, conserve larger, more contiguous tracts of land for area-sensitive species, and help mitigate climate change impacts.</p>	<p>Work with partners in 7.2 million-acre Connecticut River watershed, with particular focus on developing and enhancing partnerships in 16 CPAs.</p>	<p>Work with partners in 7.2 million-acre Connecticut River watershed with particular focus placed in developing and enhancing partnerships in 19 CPAs. Approximately 10% of the approved acquisition authority (see below) would occur within CPAs, acquired from willing sellers only, and after coordination with respective municipalities, State, and abutting landowners. The criteria for acquisition are the same as CFAs.</p>
<b>Conservation Partnership Areas (CPAs)</b>	No CPAs—Instead of targeted conservation areas, we would work with partners throughout 7.2 million-acre Connecticut River watershed.	Establish 18 CFAs that would become refuge divisions with land purchased from willing sellers (includes existing 9 divisions).	Establish 22 CFAs that would become refuge divisions with land purchased from willing sellers only (includes existing 10 divisions). The CFAs are larger under alternative D than under alternative C. Approximately 90% of the approved acreage authority, on average, would be acquired in CFAs following the criteria identified in appendix C. The remaining 10% acquisition authority would occur in the surrounding CPA as noted above.		
<b>Conservation Focus Areas (CFAs)</b>	No CFAs—we would continue to acquire lands in 65 SFAs, scattered, rare species sites, and important, scarce and vulnerable wetlands.				

	<b>Alternative A Current Management (No change from 1995 FEIS, as amended)</b>	<b>Alternative B Consolidated Stewardship (Within Existing Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative C Connections and Partnerships (Service-preferred Alternative) (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative D Reduced Management with Emphasis on Backcountry Recreation (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>
<b>Total Approved Refuge Acquisition Authority</b>	Total approved refuge acquisition authority 97,830 acres <small>(This includes post-1995 FEIS expansions to Nulhegan Basin and Pondicherry Divisions).</small>	Total approved refuge acquisition authority 97,772 acres	Total approved refuge acquisition authority 197,337 acres	Total approved refuge acquisition authority 231,307 acres
<b>Existing Refuge Units</b>	Maintain 11 existing units totaling 708 acres:			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Putney Mountain (VT)</li> <li>● Hatfield (MA)</li> <li>● Fannie Stebbins (MA)</li> <li>● Wissatinnewag (MA)</li> <li>● Third Island (MA)</li> <li>● Mount Toby (MA)</li> <li>● Mount Tom (MA)</li> <li>● Honeypot Road Wetlands (MA)</li> <li>● Dead Man's Swamp (CT)</li> <li>● Roger Tory Peterson (CT)</li> <li>● Saddle Island (NH)</li> </ul>			

	<b>Alternative A</b> <b>Current Management (No change from 1995 FEIS, as amended)</b>	<b>Alternative B</b> <b>Consolidated Stewardship (Within Existing Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative C</b> <b>Enhanced Conservation (Service-preferred Alternative) (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative D</b> <b>Reduced Management with Emphasis on Backcountry Recreation (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>
	<b>Existing and Proposed Refuge Divisions, assuming full implementation of alternative</b>	<p>There are 10 existing divisions. As lands are purchased from willing sellers only, SFAs become refuge divisions or units:</p> <p><b>Existing Divisions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Blueberry Swamp (NH)</li> <li>● Dead Branch (MA)</li> <li>● Fort River (MA)</li> <li>● Mascoma River (NH)</li> <li>● Mill River (MA)</li> <li>● Nulhegan Basin (VT)</li> <li>● Pondicherry (NH)</li> <li>● Salmon River (CT)</li> <li>● Westfield River (MA)</li> <li>● Whalebone Cove (CT)</li> </ul> <p>● Assuming acquisition of new SFAs, potentially new divisions could be established.</p>	<p>Full implementation would result in the following 18 existing and new divisions (once purchased, lands in CFAs would become refuge divisions):</p> <p><b>Existing Divisions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Blueberry Swamp (NH)</li> <li>● Dead Branch (MA)</li> <li>● Fort River (MA)</li> <li>● Mascoma River (NH)</li> <li>● Mill River (MA)</li> <li>● Nulhegan Basin (VT)</li> <li>● Pondicherry (NH)</li> <li>● Salmon River (CT)</li> <li>● Westfield River (MA)</li> <li>● Whalebone Cove (CT)</li> </ul> <p><b>Proposed Divisions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ashuelot (NH)</li> <li>● Farmington River (MA/CT)</li> <li>● Maromas (CT)</li> <li>● Muddy Brook (CT)*</li> <li>● Ompompanoosuc (VT)</li> <li>● Ottaquechee River (VT)*</li> <li>● Pyquag (CT)</li> <li>● Quonatuck</li> <li>● Scantic (CT)</li> <li>● Sprague Brook (NH)*</li> <li>● West River (VT)</li> <li>● White River (VT)*</li> </ul>	<p>Full implementation would result in the following 22 existing and new divisions (once lands purchased from willing sellers only, CFAs would become refuge divisions):</p> <p><b>Existing Divisions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Blueberry Swamp (NH)</li> <li>● Dead Branch (MA)</li> <li>● Fort River (MA)</li> <li>● Mascoma River (NH)</li> <li>● Mill River (MA)</li> <li>● Nulhegan Basin (VT)</li> <li>● Pondicherry (NH)</li> <li>● Salmon River (CT)</li> <li>● Westfield River (MA)</li> <li>● Whalebone Cove (CT)</li> </ul> <p><b>Proposed Divisions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ashuelot (NH)</li> <li>● Farmington River (MA/CT)</li> <li>● Maromas (CT)</li> <li>● Muddy Brook (CT)*</li> <li>● Ompompanoosuc (VT)</li> <li>● Ottaquechee River (VT)*</li> <li>● Pyquag (CT)</li> <li>● Quonatuck</li> <li>● Scantic (CT)</li> <li>● Sprague Brook (NH)*</li> <li>● West River (VT)</li> <li>● White River (VT)*</li> </ul>
				<p>*Proposed divisions under alternatives C and D, but not under alternative B</p> <p>If funding allows, add additional administrative, biological, maintenance, and visitor services staff (see appendix H for proposed staffing chart).</p> <p><b>Refuge Staffing</b></p> <p>Maintain existing refuge staff (see appendix H for current staffing chart).</p> <p>Compared to alternatives B and C, under alternative D, we propose fewer additional staff (see appendix H for proposed staffing chart).</p>

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Resource or Program Features	<b>Alternative A</b> <b>Current Management (No change from 1995 Final EIS, as amended)</b>	<b>Alternative B</b> <b>Consolidated Stewardship (Within Existing, Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative C</b> <b>Enhanced Conservation Connections and Partnerships (Service-preferred Alternative) (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative D</b> <b>Reduced Management with Emphasis on Backcountry Recreation (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>
<b>Goal 1 Wildlife and Habitat Conservation.</b>  Promote the biological diversity, integrity, and resiliency of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems within the Connecticut River watershed in an amount and distribution that sustains ecological function and supports healthy populations of native fish, wildlife, and plants, especially Federal trust species of conservation concern, in anticipation of the effects of climate, land use, and demographic changes.	<b>Objective 1.1 Forested Uplands and Wetlands (Including Riparian and Floodplain Forests)</b>  In cooperation with willing landowners and other partners, protect, manage, and restore forested habitats within the Connecticut River watershed. These forested habitats will help sustain the biological diversity, integrity, and ecological and hydrologic function of the river ecosystem, provide habitat connections and wildlife travel corridors, accommodate anticipated shifts in species' ranges from climate and land use changes, and support forest-dependent species of conservation concern, including migratory birds and federally listed endangered and threatened species.	<b>Forested Uplands and Wetlands:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Core Forest Blocks</b></li> <li>• <b>Forest Corridors</b></li> <li>• <b>Forest Age, Structure, and Composition</b></li> <li>• <b>Forest Wetland Integrity</b></li> <li>• <b>Climate Change Adaptation</b></li> </ul>	<b>Within CPAs</b>  Work with partners and willing landowners within the watershed, with a priority on CPA lands, to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect, restore, and promote unfragmented, contiguous blocks of forest.</li> <li>• Promote a diversity of forest age, structure, and composition to benefit a diversity of native fish, wildlife, and plants.</li> <li>• Maintain hydrologic functions and wildlife values of forested wetlands by protecting and restoring natural hydrological regimes and vegetative edges (e.g., restore floodplain forests and replace culverts and bridges).</li> <li>• Assist with developing and implementing effective climate adaptation response strategies.</li> <li>• Support the development of climate change vulnerability assessment models for the Connecticut River watershed.</li> <li>• Support and provide guidance for forest restoration efforts off refuge lands through:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Grant support, writing, and "ghost writing."</li> <li>* Technical and field assistance.</li> <li>* Cooperative and other shared resource agreements.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<b>Within CPAs</b>  Same as alternatives B and C. <b>On Refuge Lands</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No active forest management on refuge lands, except limited control of invasive species and restoration of natural processes. Instead, use passive management (e.g., natural disturbance processes and successional changes).</li> <li>• Conduct forest inventories and survey wildlife use.</li> <li>• Map natural communities and vernal pools and protect rare and exemplary natural communities.</li> <li>• Assess hydrological conditions of forested wetlands.</li> <li>• Discontinue Nulhegan Basin Division public trapping program. Only manage furbearers via trapping for management purposes on refuge lands if there are threats to human health or refuge infrastructure.</li> </ul>

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<b>Forested Uplands and Wetlands cont.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restore forested wetlands, including working with TNC to plant American elm in floodplain forests at Fort River Division.</li> <li>• Continue furbearer management program at Nulhegan Basin Division, including public trapping program, according to State and refuge regulations. Manage furbearers on other refuge divisions and units if there are threats to human health or refuge infrastructure.</li> </ul>	<p><i>On Refuge Lands</i></p> <p>Management of forested uplands and wetlands on the refuge are the same under alternatives B and C, except that there will be expanded and enhanced opportunities to protect, manage, and restore forested habitats to meet refuge and State WAPs under alternative C because of the expanded and better connected refuge land base. Under both alternatives, we would emphasize active forest management to provide contiguous forest habitat to benefit area-sensitive migratory birds and other native wildlife. Acresages below are a rough approximation. Details would be developed in step-down habitat management plans, which will be coordinated with States and stakeholders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Under alternative B, actively manage approximately 7,660 acres of forested habitat over the 15-year CCP across refuge divisions to improve habitat for priority species, including the acres we are currently managing under alternative A. Under alternative C, this would increase to approximately 11,550 acres over the 15-year CCP horizon.</li> <li>• Conduct forest inventories and survey wildlife use.</li> <li>• Identify and implement active habitat management and restoration on refuge lands (e.g., tree plantings, timber harvesting, prescribed fire, etc.) improve forest age distributions, structural complexity, and species composition.</li> <li>• Work with partners to ensure habitat management on refuge complements adjacent land management activities.</li> <li>• Maintain at least 300-meter-wide forested corridors through non-forested matrix habitat to facilitate species movement.</li> <li>• Control invasive species.</li> <li>• Monitor species response to our management.</li> <li>• Map natural communities and vernal pools and protect rare and exemplary natural communities.</li> <li>• Assess hydrological conditions of forested wetlands.</li> <li>• Continue furbearer management program at Nulhegan Basin Division; manage furbearers on other refuge divisions Control invasive species.</li> <li>• Monitor species response to our management.</li> <li>• Map natural communities and vernal pools and protect rare and exemplary natural communities.</li> <li>• Assess hydrological conditions of forested wetlands.</li> <li>• Continue furbearer management program at Nulhegan Basin Division; manage furbearers on other refuge divisions and units, by methods including trapping, as a management tool. As new lands are acquired, and where trapping is already occurring, allow it to continue as a tool to manage wildlife populations, where the management need is supported by the respective State fish and wildlife agency and it is determined compatible..</li> </ul>	

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<b>Objective 12: Non-forested Uplands and Wetlands (Freshwater Wetlands, Pasture, Hay and Grasslands)</b>  In cooperation with willing landowners and other partners, protect, manage, and restore non-forested wetlands and uplands within the Connecticut River watershed. These non-forested habitats will help sustain the biological diversity, integrity, and ecological and hydrologic function of the river ecosystem, provide habitat connections and wildlife travel corridors, accommodate anticipated shifts in species' ranges from climate and land use changes, and support dependent species of conservation concern-including migratory birds and federally listed endangered and threatened species.	<b>Non-forested Uplands and Wetlands</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with state and local agencies, private landowners, and other conservation partners to conserve active and former agricultural lands.</li> <li>• Work with partners to restore floodplain forests and other riparian habitats on former agricultural lands.</li> </ul> <b>Pasture, Hay, Grasslands and Shrublands</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restore degraded wetlands, where funding allows.</li> </ul>	<b>Off Refuge Lands</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To protect, manage, and restore freshwater wetlands, with emphasis on restoring wetland edge habitat, headwater streams, and floodplains.</li> <li>• To protect, manage, and restore shrublands to benefit shrubland-dependent species.</li> </ul> <b>On Refuge Lands</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with partners (e.g., USDA-NCRS) and willing landowners to conserve pasture, hay, and grassland habitat to benefit wildlife and/or restore former agricultural fields and promote enrollment in agricultural protection programs.</li> <li>• Support state and local efforts to sustain farming on highly productive agricultural lands, but promote best management farming practices (especially in floodplain and riparian areas).</li> <li>• Priorities for restoration include lands in active floodplains, areas that have high development pressures, or can provide critical habitat for State- and federally listed species.</li> <li>• Support and guidance for restoration efforts on other ownerships will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Grant support, writing, and "ghostwriting."</li> <li>* Technical and field assistance.</li> <li>* Cooperative and other shared resource agreements and leases.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<b>Within CPAs</b>  Same as alternatives B and C. <b>On Refuge Lands</b>  Similar to alternative C, except no active management other than invasive species control, habitat restoration and for road maintenance. We would primarily use passive management and allow natural processes and succession to occur.	

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<b>Non-forested Uplands and Wetlands cont.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to manage approximately 200 acres of grassland and shrubland, including:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Continue to manage (e.g., brushhog) up to 11 acres of shrubland every 3 to 5 years at Pondicherry Division for shrubland dependent species (e.g., woodcock).</li> <li>* Continue to implement woodcock habitat management at Nulhegan Basin Division (7 acres mowed every year for singing grounds, and 18 acres every 3 to 4 years for roosting fields).</li> <li>* Continue to mow up to 67 acres of cool season grassland each year at the Fort River Division for grassland nesting birds (e.g., northern harrier, upland sandpiper, barn owl, grasshopper sparrow, and bobolinks). Also, mow up to 22 acres of warm season grassland each 2 to 3 years.</li> <li>* Continue to mow approximately 60 acres of grasslands every 2 to 3 years at the Blueberry Swamp Division.</li> <li>* Mow approximately 16 acres of grassland at the Salmon Division River every 2 to 3 years.</li> <li>* Mow approximately 0.5 acres of grassland annually at the Dead Branch Division.</li> <li>* Continue to mow approximately 60 acres of grasslands every 2 to 3 years at the Blueberry Swamp Division.</li> <li>* Mow approximately 16 acres of grassland at the Salmon Division River every 2 to 3 years.</li> <li>* Mow approximately 0.5 acres of grassland annually at the Dead Branch Division.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><i>On Refuge Lands</i></p> <p>Alternative B and C are the same, except that there will be expanded and enhanced opportunities to protect, manage, and restore freshwater marsh habitats to meet refuge goals under alternative C because of the expanded refuge land base.</p> <p>Acreages below are a rough approximation. Details would be developed in step-down habitat management plans, which will be coordinated with States and stakeholders.</p> <p>In addition to alternative A:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restore and actively manage these habitats based on management needs and priorities.</li> <li>• Conduct plant and wildlife inventories.</li> <li>• Evaluate wetland hydrology.</li> <li>• Assess habitat conditions for priority resources of concern.</li> <li>• Protect rare or exemplary communities.</li> <li>• Minimize activities that disturb wetland communities.</li> <li>• Work with the State Natural Heritage Program to annually monitor the presence/absence of current northeastern bulrush populations in emergent wetlands.</li> <li>• Explore and support research opportunities with academic partners to address information gaps for resources of concern (e.g., northeastern bulrush, New England cottontail).</li> <li>• Monitor plant and wildlife species responses to management.</li> <li>• Control invasive species.</li> <li>• Map natural communities.</li> </ul>	<p>Under alternative B, manage approximately 422 acres of grassland. Under alternative C, this would increase to approximately 548 acres of grassland.</p> <p>Under alternatives B and C, manage (e.g., brushhog, hydroax, etc.). Approximately 775 acres of shrubland habitat to benefit migratory birds, the New England cottontail, and other shrubland-dependent species.</p>	

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<b>Non-forested Uplands and Wetlands cont.</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess the condition of newly acquired acres of pasture, hay and grassland habitats to determine if they should continue to be maintained in these habitat types or if they should be restored to native forest. Use this assessment to inform more detailed management strategies in an HMP. Where appropriate, maintain contiguous grassland habitat for breeding and migrating grassland-dependent bird species. Also, where appropriate, restore pasture and grasslands to floodplain forest.</li> <li>• Work with partners to ensure management on refuge lands complements adjacent land management. Under alternative B, manage approximately 422 acres of grassland. Under alternative C, this would increase to approximately 548 acres of grassland.</li> <li>• Under alternatives B and C, manage (e.g., brushhog, hydroax, etc.) Approximately 775 acres of shrubland habitat to benefit migratory birds, the New England cottontail, and other shrubland-dependent species.</li> <li>• Assess the condition of newly acquired acres of pasture, hay and grassland habitats to determine if they should continue to be maintained in these habitat types or if they should be restored to native forest. Use this assessment to inform more detailed management strategies in an HMP. Where appropriate, maintain contiguous grassland habitat for breeding and migrating grassland-dependent bird species. Also, where appropriate, restore pasture and grasslands to floodplain forest.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with partners to ensure management on refuge lands complements adjacent land management.</li> </ul>	

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<b>Objective 1.3: Inland Aquatic Habitats (Freshwater Rivers, Streams, Ponds, and Lakes)</b>	<p>In cooperation with willing landowners and other partners, protect and restore in-stream and riparian habitat structure and function, and restore aquatic species passage and water quality within the Connecticut River watershed to improve the ecological integrity and environmental health of the river ecosystem and enhance habitat for migratory and inter-jurisdictional fish, mussels, and other native aquatic species of conservation concern.</p>	<p><b>Inland Aquatic Habitats:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Off and On Refuge Lands</li> <li>• Work with partners to protect and restore riparian habitats to increase water quality, reduce erosion, and maintain normal temperature regimes.</li> <li>• When funding is available, work with partners to remove barriers to aquatic passage.</li> <li>• When funding is available, work with partners to initiate fish passage projects.</li> </ul> <p><b>Habitat Assessments</b></p> <p><b>Population Assessments</b></p> <p><b>Stream and Floodplain Functions</b></p> <p><b>Hydrological Modeling</b></p>	<p><i>Within CPAs</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with partners to:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop hydrologic models of Connecticut River watershed and other tools to evaluate aquatic habitat conditions; work on priorities identified by Connecticut River Coordinator's Office.</li> <li>• Inventory wildlife and fish populations of conservation concern.</li> <li>• Conduct and/or participate in short and long-term monitoring programs for puritan tiger beetle, migratory fish, mussels, and other native aquatic species of conservation concern.</li> <li>• Maintain and restore in stream, riparian, and floodplain habitats.</li> <li>• Eliminate barriers to fish and other aquatic species passage.</li> <li>• Protect and increase spawning habitat for aquatic species.</li> <li>• Reduce combined sewer overflow.</li> <li>• Continue to support research opportunities on wildlife and fish populations of conservation concern.</li> <li>• Continue support for aquatic species programs and initiatives.</li> <li>• Work with USDA-Rural Development to address storm and waste water issues in rural areas of the watershed.</li> <li>• Work with USDA-NRCS to promote riparian habitat and streambank stabilization.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><i>On Refuge Lands</i></p> <p>No active management other than invasive species control and habitat restoration described under alternatives B and C. Instead, we would primarily use passive management and allow natural processes to occur.</p>	

Resource or Program Features	Inland Aquatic Habitats cont.	Alternative A Current Management (No change from 1995 Final EIS, as amended)	Alternative B Consolidated Stewardship (Within Existing, Approved Acquisition Authority)	Alternative C Enhanced Conservation Connections and Partnerships (Service-preferred Alternative) (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)	Alternative D Reduced Management with Emphasis on Backcountry Recreation (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support and guidance for restoration efforts on other ownerships within CPAs will include:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Grant support and writing.</li> <li>* Technical and field assistance.</li> <li>* Cooperative and other shared resource agreements.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><i>On Refuge Lands</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alternative B and C are the same, except that there will be expanded and enhanced opportunities to protect, manage, and restore inland aquatic habitats to meet refuge goals under alternative C because of the expanded refuge land base. Support and guidance for restoration efforts on other ownerships within CPAs will include:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Grant support and writing.</li> <li>* Technical and field assistance.</li> <li>* Cooperative and other shared resource agreements.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><i>On Refuge Lands</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alternative B and C are the same, except that there will be expanded and enhanced opportunities to protect, manage, and restore inland aquatic habitats to meet refuge goals under alternative C because of the expanded refuge land base. Test the effectiveness of tools to evaluate aquatic habitat conditions.</li> <li>• Map natural communities and protect rare and exemplary communities.</li> <li>• Monitor species and habitat response to management.</li> <li>• Maintain conservation buffers along riparian habitats (at least 300 meters).</li> <li>• Control invasive species.</li> <li>• Work with partners to:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Inventory aquatic resources including mussels, invertebrates, and fish.</li> <li>* Manage and protect purple tiger beetles at Deadman's Swamp Unit.</li> <li>* Perform habitat surveys and quantify potential spawning and nursery habitat for fish such as brook trout.</li> <li>* Evaluate the productivity and health of fish communities.</li> <li>* Conduct stream assessments to identify man-made physical barriers (e.g., culverts, dams, impassable road crossings) to aquatic species passage.</li> <li>* Develop a plan for protection and restoration of native races of brook trout, and other aquatic species.</li> <li>* Develop and implement a plan to remove barriers to aquatic species passage.</li> <li>* Protect and increase hard bottom substrate for spawning aquatic species.</li> <li>* Reduce combined sewer overflow.</li> <li>* Restore degraded streams.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>			

Resource or Program Features	<b>Alternative A</b> <b>Current Management (No change from 1995 Final EIS, as amended)</b>	<b>Alternative B</b> <b>Consolidated Stewardship (Within Existing, Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative C</b> <b>Enhanced Conservation Connections and Partnerships (Service-preferred Alternative) (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative D</b> <b>Reduced Management with Emphasis on Backcountry Recreation (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>
<b>Objective 1.4 Coastal Non-forested Uplands (Coastal Beaches and Rocky Shores)</b>	<p>In cooperation with willing landowners and other partners, protect, manage, and restore coastal non-forested uplands within the Connecticut River watershed. These non-forested habitats will help sustain the biological diversity, integrity, and ecological and hydrologic function of the river estuary ecosystem, provide habitat connections and wildlife travel corridors, accommodate anticipated shifts in species' ranges from climate and land use changes, and support coastal upland-dependent species of conservation concern-including migratory birds and Federally-listed endangered and threatened species.</p>	<p><b>Coastal Non-forested Uplands, including Coastal Beaches and Rocky Shores :</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Habitat Restoration</li> <li>• Public use management</li> </ul>	<p><b>Off Refuge Lands</b></p> <p>Limited and indirect support and guidance for restoration efforts on other ownerships within the watershed.</p>	<p><b>Within CPAs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the LISS HRI goals and objectives.</li> <li>• Provide information to partners and willing landowners to support informed decisions about balancing human use of shorelines with the needs of nesting birds of conservation concern and sensitive dune habitats.</li> <li>• Provide support and guidance for restoration efforts on other ownerships within CPAs, which will include:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Grant support and writing and "ghost writing."</li> <li>* Technical and field assistance.</li> <li>* Cooperative and other shared resource agreements.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>On Refuge Lands</b></p> <p>Alternative B and C are same, but not much of this habitat type occurs in proposed CFAs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct habitat and wildlife inventories.</li> <li>• Map natural communities; protect rare or exemplary examples.</li> <li>• Work with partners to ensure management on Service lands complement adjacent land management objectives.</li> <li>• Work with partners to restore these habitats on refuge lands.</li> </ul>
				<p><b>Within CPAs</b></p> <p>Same as alternatives B and C.</p> <p><b>On Refuge Lands</b></p> <p>Similar to alternatives B and C, except no active management other than invasive species control and habitat restoration. Instead, we would use passive management and allow natural processes to occur.</p>

Resource or Program Features	<b>Alternative A</b> <b>Current Management (No change from 1995 Final EIS, as amended)</b>	<b>Alternative B</b> <b>Consolidated Stewardship (Within Existing, Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative C</b> <b>Enhanced Conservation Connections and Partnerships (Service-preferred Alternative) (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative D</b> <b>Reduced Management with Emphasis on Backcountry Recreation (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>
<b>Objectives</b>	<b>1.5 Coastal Wetlands and Aquatic Habitats (Tidal Salt Marsh and Estuary)</b>  In cooperation with willing landowners and other partners, protect, manage, and restore coastal wetlands and other coastal aquatic habitats within the Connecticut River watershed. These coastal aquatic habitats will help sustain the biological diversity, ecological integrity, and hydrologic function of the river ecosystem, provide habitat connections and wildlife travel corridors, accommodate anticipated shifts in species' ranges from climate and land use changes, and support coastal wetland-dependent species of conservation concern - including inter-jurisdictional fish, native aquatic species, waterfowl and wading birds and Federally listed endangered and threatened species.	<b>2.1 Coastal Wetlands and Aquatic Habitats</b>  Off Refuge Lands Limited and indirect support and guidance for restoration efforts on other ownerships within the watershed.	<b>2.1 Coastal Wetlands and Aquatic Habitats</b>  On Refuge Lands Restore degraded wetlands, as funding allows.	<b>2.1 Coastal Wetlands and Aquatic Habitats</b>  Within CPAs Work with partners to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the LISS HRI goals and objectives.</li> <li>• Conduct short- and long-term monitoring of migratory fish, mussels, and other native aquatic species of conservation concern.</li> <li>• Develop coastal system models that incorporate climate change predictions.</li> <li>• Inventory wildlife and fish populations of conservation concern.</li> <li>• Support research opportunities on wildlife and fish populations of conservation concern.</li> <li>• Support and guidance for restoration efforts on other ownerships within CPAs will include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Grant support and writing and "ghost writing."</li> <li>* Technical and field assistance.</li> <li>* Cooperative and other shared resource agreements.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> On Refuge Lands Alternative B and C are the same, except that there will be expanded and enhanced opportunities to protect, manage, and restore these coastal habitats to meet refuge goals under alternative C because of the expanded refuge land base. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use active habitat management and restoration (e.g. restore ditched marshes, prescribed fire, and invasive plant control).</li> <li>• Minimize activities that disturb wetland communities.</li> <li>• Monitor response of priority refuge resources of concern species to refuge management.</li> <li>• Conduct habitat and wildlife inventories.</li> <li>• Map natural communities and protect rare and exemplary communities.</li> <li>• Work with partners to ensure management of Service lands complements adjacent land management objectives.</li> </ul>

Resource or Program Features	<b>Alternative A</b> <i>Current Management (No change from 1995 Final EIS, as amended)</i>	<b>Alternative B</b> <i>Consolidated Stewardship (Within Existing, Approved Acquisition Authority)</i>	<b>Alternative C</b> <i>Enhanced Conservation Connections and Partnerships (Service-preferred Alternative) (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</i>	<b>Alternative D</b> <i>Reduced Management with Emphasis on Backcountry Recreation (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</i>
<b>Coastal Wetlands and Aquatic Habitat cont.:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Habitat Restoration</b></li> <li>• <b>Population Assessments</b></li> <li>• <b>Climate Change</b></li> </ul>	<p><i>On Refuge Lands</i></p> <p>Alternative B and C are the same, except that there will be expanded and enhanced opportunities to protect, manage, and restore these coastal habitats to meet refuge goals under alternative C because of the expanded refuge land base.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use active habitat management and restoration (e.g. restore ditched marshes, prescribed fire, and invasive plant control).</li> <li>• Minimize activities that disturb wetland communities.</li> <li>• Monitor response of priority refuge resources of concern species to refuge management.</li> <li>• Conduct habitat and wildlife inventories.</li> <li>• Map natural communities and protect rare and exemplary communities.</li> <li>• Work with partners to ensure management of Service lands complements adjacent land management objectives.</li> </ul>			

Resource or Program Sub-objectives	<b>Alternative A</b> <u>Current Management</u> <b>(No change from 1995 FEIS, as amended)</b>	<b>Alternative B</b> <u>Consolidated Stewardship</u> <b>(Within Existing, Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative C</b> <u>Enhanced Conservation Connections and Partnerships (Service-preferred Alternative)</u> <b>(Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative D</b> <u>Reduced Management with Emphasis on Backcountry Recreation</u> <b>(Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>
<b>Goal 2: Environmental Education, Interpretation, and Outreach</b>	Inspire residents and visitors to actively participate in the conservation and stewardship of the exceptional natural and cultural resources in the Connecticut River watershed, and promote a greater understanding and appreciation of the role of the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge in conserving those resources.			
<b>Objective 2.1 Environmental Education.</b>	In collaboration with public and private educators from all four States in the watershed, lead or facilitate the implementation of structured, high quality, natural and cultural resource curricula. The focus will be on guiding educators and students to: develop an awareness of, and concern about, natural and cultural resources and associated challenges; appreciate our conservation history, make informed decisions and work individually or collectively toward solutions; and, model responsible environmental stewardship in their everyday lives.			

Resource or Program Sub-objectives	<b>Alternative A Current Management (No change from 1995 FEIS, as amended)</b>	<b>Alternative B Consolidated Stewardship (Within Existing, Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative C Enhanced Conservation Connections and Partnerships (Service-preferred Alternative) (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative D Reduced Management with Emphasis on Backcountry Recreation (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>
<b>Objective 2.1 Environmental Education.</b> In collaboration with public and private educators from all four States in the watershed, lead or facilitate the implementation of structured, high quality, natural and cultural resource curricula. The focus will be on guiding educators and students to: develop an awareness of, and concern about, natural and cultural resources and associated challenges; appreciate our conservation history; make informed decisions and work individually or collectively toward solutions; and, model responsible environmental stewardship in their everyday lives.	<b>Environmental Education Delivery</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to offer these environmental education opportunities in line with existing staff and resource capacities:</li> <li>• Use staff, volunteers, and members of Friends groups to facilitate teachers and students at existing refuge and partner facilities.</li> <li>• Use refuge facilities to provide opportunities for teacher-led classes as well as other environmental education entities.</li> <li>• Have the WoW Express visit schools in each of the four states targeting students in grades 3 through 5. The goal is to capitalize on student contacts by increasing the amount of time spent with students to create a better quality experience for them.</li> <li>• Have the WoW Express visit environmentally based summer camps in each of the four states.</li> <li>• Use staff, volunteers, and members of friends groups to facilitate teachers and students at existing partner facilities.</li> <li>• Continue to support partnership with the State of Massachusetts at the Great Falls Discovery Center.</li> </ul>	<b>Environmental Education Delivery</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to offer these environmental education opportunities in line with existing staff and resource capacities:</li> <li>• Use staff, volunteers, and members of Friends groups to facilitate teachers and students at existing refuge and partner facilities.</li> <li>• Use refuge facilities to provide opportunities for teacher-led classes as well as other environmental education entities.</li> <li>• Have the WoW Express visit schools in each of the four states targeting students in grades 3 through 5. The goal is to capitalize on student contacts by increasing the amount of time spent with students to create a better quality experience for them.</li> <li>• Have the WoW Express visit environmentally based summer camps in each of the four states.</li> <li>• Use staff, volunteers, and members of friends groups to facilitate teachers and students at existing partner facilities.</li> <li>• Continue to support partnership with the State of Massachusetts at the Great Falls Discovery Center.</li> </ul>	<b>Environmental Education Delivery</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to offer these environmental education opportunities in line with existing staff and resource capacities:</li> <li>• Use staff, volunteers, and members of Friends groups to facilitate teachers and students at existing refuge and partner facilities.</li> <li>• Use refuge facilities to provide opportunities for teacher-led classes as well as other environmental education entities.</li> <li>• Have the WoW Express visit schools in each of the four states targeting students in grades 3 through 5. The goal is to capitalize on student contacts by increasing the amount of time spent with students to create a better quality experience for them.</li> <li>• Have the WoW Express visit environmentally based summer camps in each of the four states.</li> <li>• Use staff, volunteers, and members of friends groups to facilitate teachers and students at existing partner facilities.</li> <li>• Continue to support partnership with the State of Massachusetts at the Great Falls Discovery Center.</li> </ul>	<b>Environmental Education Delivery</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to offer these environmental education opportunities in line with existing staff and resource capacities:</li> <li>• Use staff, volunteers, and members of Friends groups to facilitate teachers and students at existing refuge and partner facilities.</li> <li>• Use refuge facilities to provide opportunities for teacher-led classes as well as other environmental education entities.</li> <li>• Have the WoW Express visit schools in each of the four states targeting students in grades 3 through 5. The goal is to capitalize on student contacts by increasing the amount of time spent with students to create a better quality experience for them.</li> <li>• Have the WoW Express visit environmentally based summer camps in each of the four states.</li> <li>• Use staff, volunteers, and members of friends groups to facilitate teachers and students at existing partner facilities.</li> <li>• Continue to support partnership with the State of Massachusetts at the Great Falls Discovery Center.</li> </ul>

Resource or Program Sub-objectives	<b>Alternative A</b> <i>Current Management (No change from 1995 FEIS, as amended)</i>	<b>Alternative B</b> <i>Consolidated Stewardship (Within Existing, Approved Acquisition Authority)</i>	<b>Alternative C</b> <i>Enhanced Conservation Connections and Partnerships (Service-preferred Alternative) (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</i>	<b>Alternative D</b> <i>Reduced Management with Emphasis on Backcountry Recreation (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</i>
<b>Objective 2.2 Interpretation</b>	<p>Develop, lead, and facilitate interpretive programs that emotionally and intellectually connect the audience to natural and cultural resources in the watershed.</p>	<p>Our first priority would be to provide interpretive programs in CPAs and on refuge lands. We would then, time and resources permitting, work throughout the rest of the watershed.</p>	<p>In addition to strategies under alternative A:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with partners to create consistent interpretive themes.</li> <li>• Develop interpretive goals, objectives, and strategies; incorporate these into a Visitor Services Plan.</li> <li>• Develop an evaluation process to measure effectiveness of interpretation programs.</li> <li>• Develop a core set of interpretive programs.</li> <li>• Establish relationships with Tribes and local and watershed historians to incorporate cultural history into interpretive programs.</li> <li>• Make Certified Interpretive Guide (National Association for Interpretation) training available once every other year for refuge personnel, volunteers, and others.</li> <li>• Update existing and develop new interpretive materials that incorporate interpretive messages and themes and new media and technologies (e.g., QR codes, cell ranger), including general brochures, bird lists, self-guided interpretive trails, signs, kiosks, etc.</li> </ul>	<p>Same as alternatives B and C, except that interpretation themes and messages will focus on low-impact land use, natural processes, and interpreting wilderness experiences rather than active habitat management.</p>

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<b>Objective 2.2 Interpretation</b>	Develop, lead, and facilitate interpretive programs that emotionally and intellectually connect the audience to natural and cultural resources in the watershed.	<b>Natural and Cultural Resource Program Delivery</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to offer these interpretive opportunities in line with existing staff and resource capacities:</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annually provide quality interpretive programs, exhibits, printed media at refuge facilities and properties.</li> <li>• Provide personal contacts at visitor centers, such as Great Falls Discovery Center and Nulhegan Basin Division, to initiate discussion and answer questions.</li> <li>• Support partner facilities such as Great Northwoods Visitor Center, VINS, and Springfield Science Museum through cooperative agreements and the sharing of resources.</li> </ul>	<p>Same as alternatives B and C, except that the number of interpretation participants on refuge lands may decrease due to reduced access in keeping with this alternative's theme of promoting a low human footprint on refuge lands.</p>

Resource or Program Sub-objectives	<b>Alternative A</b> <u>Current Management</u> <b>(No change from 1995 FEIS, as amended)</b>	<b>Alternative B</b> <u>Consolidated Stewardship</u> <b>(Within Existing, Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative C</b> <u>Enhanced Conservation Connections and Partnerships (Service-preferred Alternative)</u> <b>(Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative D</b> <u>Reduced Management with Emphasis on Backcountry Recreation</u> <b>(Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>
<b>Objective 2.3 Public and Community Outreach</b>	<p>Support, promote, and coordinate a wide range of outreach tools and activities to facilitate and improve communications and relationships with the American public and to articulate the importance of local conserved lands, including the refuge, to the watershed. Target audiences include: community members, adjacent landowners, and elected officials in the Connecticut River Watershed. Citizens will be empowered to recognize and resolve local natural resource issues and promote conservation and the responsible use of natural resources.</p>	<p><b>Local Community Residents and Officials</b></p> <p>Continue these outreach opportunities in line with existing staff and resource capacities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain good lines of communication with refuge neighbors and community leaders.</li> <li>• Draft annual reports that introduce residents to the refuge, describe refuge accomplishments, detail visitor opportunities, and discuss refuge operations and current and future refuge projects.</li> <li>• Attend select board meetings, and visit town clerks, mayors, planners and other elected officials as needed to keep them apprised of refuge issues and projects.</li> </ul> <p>In addition to alternative A:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work directly with Chambers of Commerce, Rotary Clubs, and other civic and nonprofit organizations.</li> <li>• Keep neighboring and nearby landowners informed of refuge management activities.</li> <li>• Inform community members about refuge management practices, public use opportunities, and regulations, as well as the economic benefits of the refuge to the local economy.</li> <li>• Support and participate in community celebrations and events.</li> <li>• Develop and publicize special programming of interest to local residents and media on refuge lands.</li> <li>• Support outreach activities of refuge Friends groups and partners.</li> <li>• Evaluate and modify, as necessary, outreach efforts.</li> <li>• Conduct open houses on refuge divisions and partnership areas to introduce residents and local officials to the refuge.</li> <li>• Develop and implement an outreach plan for communicating with landowners to inform and educate them on their role within the watershed and how they can contribute. Plan would include tools and strategies. Possible tools would include landowner workshops, behind the scene tours, special open houses, and publications oriented toward them specifically.</li> </ul>		

Resource or Program Sub-objectives	<b>Alternative A</b> <u>Current Management</u> <b>(No change from 1995 FEIS, as amended)</b>	<b>Alternative B</b> <u>Consolidated Stewardship</u> <b>(Within Existing, Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative C</b> <u>Enhanced Conservation Connections and Partnerships (Service-preferred Alternative)</u> <b>(Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative D</b> <u>Reduced Management with Emphasis on Backcountry Recreation</u> <b>(Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>
<b>Objective 2.3 Public and Community Outreach</b> <p>Support, promote, and coordinate a wide range of outreach tools and activities to facilitate and improve communications and relationships with the American public and to articulate the importance of local conserved lands, including the refuge, to the watershed. Target audiences include: community members, adjacent landowners, and elected officials in the Connecticut River Watershed. Citizens will be empowered to recognize and resolve local natural resource issues and promote conservation and the responsible use of natural resources.</p>	<p><b>Local Community Residents and Officials cont.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write issue driven outreach plans to keep elected officials informed of refuge and partner accomplishments and of issues within the watershed that have possible impacts to the refuge.</li> <li>• Pro-actively schedule consistent meetings with elected officials to share and update each other on constituent concerns and opportunities.</li> <li>• Develop messages and actions that frame refuge units as an asset to the local community. Example benefits that the refuge provides the community include: environmental education and interpretation programming, special events hosted for the community, employment for local youth through YCC, mutual aid agreements, etc.</li> <li>• Learn how to coordinate effectively with partner organizations to spread the Conte Refuge message to their membership (Audubon, TNC, Trust for Public Land (TPL), etc.).</li> <li>• Develop at least 10 Conte Corners with at least two in each state.</li> <li>• Create special programming that will draw local residents and media (i.e., participating in community events and festivals, etc.).</li> <li>• Fully implement the Adopt-a-Habitat program to be used as an outreach tool for schools and community residents to learn about and become stewards of their local environment.</li> </ul>	<p><i>In addition to alternative A:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet with political leaders and officials to inform and educate them on management practices occurring in their districts.</li> </ul>	<p><i>In addition to alternative A:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a media outreach plan with consistent refuge messages.</li> </ul>	

Resource or Program Sub-objectives	<b>Alternative A</b> <b>Current Management</b> <b>(No change from 1995 FEIS, as amended)</b>	<b>Alternative B</b> <b>Consolidated Stewardship</b> <b>(Within Existing, Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative C</b> <b>Enhanced Conservation Connections and Partnerships (Service-preferred Alternative)</b> <b>(Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative D</b> <b>Reduced Management with Emphasis on Backcountry Recreation</b> <b>(Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>
<b>Objective 2.3 Public and Community Outreach</b>  Support, promote, and coordinate a wide range of outreach tools and activities to facilitate and improve communications and relationships with the American public and to articulate the importance of local conserved lands, including the refuge, to the watershed. Target audiences include: community members, adjacent landowners, and elected officials in the Connecticut River Watershed. Citizens will be empowered to recognize and resolve local natural resource issues and promote conservation and the responsible use of natural resources.	<b>Greater Watershed Community</b>  Continue these outreach opportunities in line with existing staff and resource capacities:	In addition to alternative A:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote the refuge as a destination for recreation, interpretation, and environmental education opportunities.</li> <li>• Promote refuge lands for special events such as National Wildlife Refuge Week, International Migratory Bird Day, Earth Day, etc.</li> <li>• Support existing Friends groups and establish new groups as divisions are established.</li> <li>• Provide outreach materials at partners' facilities.</li> <li>• Promote cooperation with partners for the use of facilities, programs, and staff when conducting outreach.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attract visitors by linking the refuge and watershed to regional tourism, birding, and recreational programs.</li> <li>• Encourage citizen participation in activities throughout the watershed.</li> <li>• Maintain a well-written and informative Web site.</li> <li>• Create displays promoting the refuge for placement at major regional points of interest or entry (e.g., airports).</li> <li>• Use the WoW Express, the BAT, and other mobile exhibits to participate at regional environmental- and recreational-themed events, shows, and conferences.</li> <li>• Produce conservation messages that reach a wide range of audiences through a variety of media (e.g., print, broadcast, social).</li> <li>• With partners, explore communication strategies to reach targeted audiences with common messages.</li> <li>• Sponsor at least one Bio Blitz on refuge lands in each state, and ultimately in each division/or local community in conjunction with Adopt-a-Habitat program.</li> <li>• Offer the WoW exhibits and an interpreter to partners when feasible. Establish partnerships across the Watershed to jointly deliver WoW Express interpretive programs.</li> <li>• In cooperation with partners seek to interpret messages with the expansion of the Connecticut River Birding Trail to a Source to Sea birding trail.</li> <li>• Work with non-traditional venues (e.g., airports, shopping malls) to install interpretive media appropriate for general audiences.</li> </ul>	

Resource or Program Sub-objectives	<b>Alternative A</b> <u>Current Management</u> <b>(No change from 1995 FEIS, as amended)</b>	<b>Alternative B</b> <u>Consolidated Stewardship</u> <b>(Within Existing, Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative C</b> <u>Enhanced Conservation Connections and Partnerships (Service-preferred Alternative)</u> <b>(Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative D</b> <u>Reduced Management with Emphasis on Backcountry Recreation</u> <b>(Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>
<b>Objective 2.4 Scientific and Technical Outreach</b>				
Facilitate the collection and exchange of information that increases the knowledge and understanding of natural and cultural resources, addresses climate and land use changes and other conservation issues, and provides land managers with better information to make management decisions affecting resources.				
<b>Institutions of Higher Learning and Other Partners Conducting Relevant Conservation Research</b>	<p>Continue these outreach opportunities in line with existing staff and resource capacities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with partners to conduct research relevant to refuge management issues.</li> </ul>	<p>In addition to alternative A:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formulate a list of important natural resource research questions that the refuge is interested in and share them with colleges and universities as possible graduate and undergraduate research projects.</li> <li>Develop formal agreements with universities and other partners to conduct research on refuge lands.</li> <li>In collaboration with the Friends of Conte seek funding for high priority research.</li> </ul>		<p>Same as alternatives B and C, except the majority of research on the refuge would focus on studying, inventorying, and monitoring natural processes.</p>
<b>Technology and Information Exchange Related to Conservation Topics</b>	<p>Continue these outreach opportunities in line with existing staff and resource capacities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Play an active role in technology and information exchange.</li> <li>Sponsor/host science based conferences as opportunities arise.</li> <li>Encourage staff to participate in relevant, natural and cultural resource conferences that will contribute to making good decisions.</li> </ul>		<p>In addition to alternative A:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Host science forums to share research results with partners and the general public.</li> <li>Distribute 'lessons learned' from refuge management to interested parties.</li> <li>Provide inventory and monitoring summaries through the refuge website.</li> </ul>	
<b>Mentoring Students</b>	<p>Continue these outreach opportunities, in line with existing staff and resource capacities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reach out to local universities for student employment positions.</li> <li>Offer student internships and host field trips.</li> <li>Participate periodically in presenting information to classes at local universities and colleges.</li> </ul>		<p>In addition to alternative A:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seek opportunities to participate in student workshops, trainings, and events.</li> <li>Develop a mentoring program to work with students to help them identify their career goals and introduce career paths within the Service.</li> <li>Participate in undergraduate and graduate level classes at local universities and colleges, presenting information on various topics and issues of relevance to the refuge.</li> </ul>	

Resource or Program Features	<b>Alternative A</b> <b>Current Management (No change from 1995 Final EIS, as amended)</b>	<b>Alternative B</b> <b>Consolidated Stewardship (Within Existing, Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative C</b> <b>Enhanced Conservation Connections and Partnerships (Service-preferred Alternative) (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative D</b> <b>Reduced Management with Emphasis on Backcountry Recreation (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>
<b>Goal 3: Recreation.</b>	Promote high quality, public recreational opportunities in the Connecticut River watershed that are complementary between ownerships and provide regional linkages, with emphasis on promoting wildlife-dependent activities that connect people with nature in the outdoors.			
<b>Objective 3.1 Hunting</b>	Support quality public hunting opportunities in the Connecticut River watershed in cooperation with willing landowners to promote a unique understanding and appreciation of natural resources and their management, including the role of the Service and other public lands in resource conservation, while also protecting a traditional outdoor pastime deeply rooted in America's natural and cultural heritage and conservation history.	<b>Hunting Opportunities, Access, and Infrastructure</b>	<i>On Refuge Lands</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to support hunting opportunities on lands within CPAs.</li> <li>• Collaborate with state fish and wildlife agencies to prepare and distribute a map of hunting opportunities within CPAs.</li> </ul> <i>On Refuge Lands</i> <p>Alternatives B and C are the same, except there will be greater hunting opportunities under alternative C (i.e., more acres open to hunting) due to the larger refuge land base.</p> <p>In addition to alternative A:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Nulhegan Basin Division</li> <li>* Putney Mountain Unit</li> <li>* Blueberry Swamp Division</li> <li>* Pondicherry Division</li> <li>* Fort River Division</li> <li>* Mill River Division</li> <li>* Dead Branch Division</li> <li>* Salmon River Division</li> </ul> <p>• Complete all administrative requirements to maintain these hunts (e.g., hunt packages).</p> <p>• Actively develop and maintain access enhancements on refuge facilities, including consideration for disabled hunters.</p>	<i>Within CPAs</i> Same as alternatives B and C. <i>On Refuge Lands</i> In addition to alternative C: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within current and future refuge lands, focus on providing "back country" hunting experiences. For example, reducing overall road density and not creating new infrastructure unless needed to reduce user impacts, enhance safety, or to better distribute use.</li> <li>• Within current and future refuge lands, consider providing opportunities for disabled hunters based on the existing infrastructure.</li> </ul>

Resource or Program Features	<b>Alternative A</b> <b>Current Management (No change from 1995 Final EIS, as amended)</b>	<b>Alternative B</b> <b>Consolidated Stewardship (Within Existing, Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative C</b> <b>Enhanced Conservation Connections and Partnerships (Service-preferred Alternative) (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative D</b> <b>Reduced Management with Emphasis on Backcountry Recreation (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>
<b>Objective 3.1 Hunting</b>	<p>Support quality public hunting opportunities in the Connecticut River watershed in cooperation with willing landowners to promote a unique understanding and appreciation of natural resources and their management, including the role of the Service and other public lands in resource conservation, while also protecting a traditional outdoor pastime deeply rooted in America's natural and cultural heritage and conservation history.</p>	<p><b>Hunter Education and Outreach</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue current levels of outreach, which is primarily through direct contact with the public, flyers posted at kiosks, and information posted on the refuge Web site.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer refuge facilities as host sites for State-directed hunter education courses.</li> <li>Engage staff and volunteers in the delivery of established programs such as "Becoming a Bowhunter."</li> <li>Partner with state fish and wildlife agencies, hunt clubs, and others to host a National Hunting and Fishing Day event in each of the states annually.</li> <li>Use the WoW Express to share important hunting messages regarding the traditional values, ethics, safety, etc. at festivals, fairs, and other public events.</li> <li>Provide hunt brochures, including regulations and maps, on the refuge Web site and at visitor contact points.</li> <li>Work with the state fish and wildlife agencies to identify and evaluate the impacts associated with requiring the use of non-toxic ammunition for hunting on refuge lands.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with state fish and wildlife agencies and the outdoor guide community to inform hunters of the backcountry hunting opportunities on refuge divisions.</li> <li>Stress the nature of, and expectations for, a backcountry hunting experience.</li> <li>Use the WoW Express to share important hunting messages at festivals, fairs, and other public events.</li> <li>Provide hunt brochures, including regulations and maps, on the refuge Web site and at visitor contact points.</li> </ul>

Resource or Program Features	<b>Alternative A</b> <b>Current Management (No change from 1995 Final EIS, as amended)</b>	<b>Alternative B</b> <b>Consolidated Stewardship (Within Existing, Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative C</b> <b>Enhanced Conservation Connections and Partnerships (Service-preferred Alternative) (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative D</b> <b>Reduced Management with Emphasis on Backcountry Recreation (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>
<b>Objective 3.2 Fishing</b>	<p>Support quality public fishing opportunities in the Connecticut River watershed in cooperation with willing landowners to promote an understanding and appreciation of natural resources and their management, including the role of the Service and other public lands in resource conservation, while also protecting a traditional outdoor pastime deeply rooted in America's natural heritage and conservation history.</p>	<p><b>Fishing Opportunities, Access, and Infrastructure</b></p> <p>Continue to offer fishing at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Nulhegan Basin Division</li> <li>* Blueberry Swamp Division</li> <li>* Pondicherry Division</li> <li>* Fort River Division</li> <li>* Mill River Division</li> <li>* Dead Branch Division</li> <li>* Salmon River Division</li> </ul> <p>Complete all administrative requirements to maintain these fishing opportunities (e.g., fishing packages).</p>	<p><b>On Refuge Lands</b></p> <p><i>Within CPAs</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With partners, promote fishing opportunities in the watershed by securing access to waters and developing infrastructure.</li> <li>• Actively develop and maintain access enhancements on and off refuge lands, including consideration for disabled anglers.</li> <li>• Collaborate with state fish and wildlife agencies to publish a fishing guide to publicly accessible waters within the watershed.</li> </ul> <p><i>On Refuge Lands</i></p> <p>Alternative B and C are the same, except there will be greater fishing opportunities under alternative C due to the larger refuge land base.</p> <p>In addition to alternative A:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When compatible, allow fishing on current and future refuge lands with fishable waters, consistent with state regulations (some refuge-specific regulations may also apply and some units are not open due to sensitive resources).</li> </ul>	<p><i>Within CPAs</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate with state fish and wildlife agencies to emphasize native fish of local origin in their stocking programs.</li> </ul> <p><i>On Refuge Lands</i></p> <p>In addition to alternative C:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasize backcountry, low density fishing opportunities.</li> <li>• No new infrastructure unless needed to reduce user impacts, enhance safety, or to better distribute use.</li> </ul>

Resource or Program Features	<b>Alternative A</b> <b>Current Management (No change from 1995 Final EIS, as amended)</b>  <b>Alternative B</b> <b>Consolidated Stewardship (Within Existing, Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative C</b> <b>Enhanced Conservation Connections and Partnerships (Service-preferred Alternative) (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative D</b> <b>Reduced Management with Emphasis on Backcountry Recreation (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>
<b>Angler Education and Outreach</b>	<p>Outreach is primarily through direct contact with the public, posted flyers on kiosks, and the refuge Web site.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Host fly-tying and other fishing "seminars" at refuge facilities to encourage increased participation, especially by women and children.</li> <li>Partner with others to host a National Hunting and Fishing Day event in the form of training and/or demonstrations at least once in each of the four states each year.</li> <li>Partner with state fish and wildlife agencies, hunt clubs, and others to host a "Take Me Fishing" event in support of National Fishing Day.</li> <li>Produce fishing flyer/s/brochures and make available at kiosks and on the refuge Web site.</li> <li>Work with the state fish and wildlife agencies to identify and evaluate the impacts associated with requiring the use of non-toxic tackle for fishing on refuge lands.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Objective 3.3 Wildlife Observation and Photography</b> Support quality, public opportunities to observe and photograph wildlife in a variety of natural habitats in the Connecticut River watershed in order to connect a broad spectrum of people with nature.</p>	<p><b>Within CPAs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with partners and willing landowners to encourage and facilitate wildlife observation and photography opportunities in the watershed.</li> </ul> <p><b>On Refuge Lands</b></p> <p>Alternatives B and C are the same, except there will be greater wildlife observation and photography opportunities under alternative C due to the larger refuge land base.</p> <p>In addition to alternative A:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When compatible, open current and future refuge lands to wildlife observation and photography.</li> <li>When compatible, construct additional miles of hiking trails, blinds, and viewing platforms that highlight varied habitats, terrain, and vistas. Construct at least one Americans with Disabilities Act universally-accessible trail, parking area, and kiosk at every refuge division, once sufficient land is purchased.</li> <li>Proposed projects include: 7.2 miles of trails at the Nulhegan Basin Division, 0.6 miles at the Putney Mountain Unit, and 1.9 miles at the Pondicherry Division.</li> <li>When compatible, allow for professionally guided wildlife observation tours and photography seminars, subject to special use permits.</li> <li>Evaluate all existing and proposed refuge infrastructure to provide access to those with disabilities.</li> <li>At the more northerly Divisions, create pull-offs along plowed public roads to allow greater winter access for pedestrians.</li> <li>Host a Big Sit at refuge divisions and other opportunities for visitors to get involved in refuge research and monitoring projects (e.g., bird banding, woodcock surveys).</li> </ul> <p><b>Within CPAs</b></p> <p>Same as alternatives B and C.</p> <p><b>On Refuge Lands</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain existing public use infrastructure, with no new trails, roads, etc.</li> <li>Repurpose former logging roads and skid trails as "unimproved" hiking trails.</li> <li>Limit additional infrastructure to that necessary to reduce impacts, better distribute use, or for safety considerations such as parking areas, informational kiosks, etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Wildlife Observation and Photography Opportunities, Access, and Infrastructure</b>	<p><b>Within CPAs</b></p> <p>Not addressed in 1995 FEIS.</p> <p><b>On Refuge Lands</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All divisions and most units open to wildlife observation and photography through pre-acquisition compatibility determinations (Wissatinnewag, Saddle Island, and Dead Man's Swamp Units are closed to all public use to protect sensitive resources; Mount Tom currently closed due to public safety and vandalism concerns).</li> </ul>	<p><b>Within CPAs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with partners and willing landowners to encourage and facilitate wildlife observation and photography opportunities in the watershed.</li> </ul> <p><b>On Refuge Lands</b></p> <p>Alternatives B and C are the same, except there will be greater wildlife observation and photography opportunities under alternative C due to the larger refuge land base.</p>	<p><b>Within CPAs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with partners and willing landowners to encourage and facilitate wildlife observation and photography opportunities in the watershed.</li> </ul> <p><b>On Refuge Lands</b></p> <p>Alternatives B and C are the same, except there will be greater wildlife observation and photography opportunities under alternative C due to the larger refuge land base.</p> <p>In addition to alternative A:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When compatible, open current and future refuge lands to wildlife observation and photography.</li> <li>When compatible, construct additional miles of hiking trails, blinds, and viewing platforms that highlight varied habitats, terrain, and vistas. Construct at least one Americans with Disabilities Act universally-accessible trail, parking area, and kiosk at every refuge division, once sufficient land is purchased.</li> <li>Proposed projects include: 7.2 miles of trails at the Nulhegan Basin Division, 0.6 miles at the Putney Mountain Unit, and 1.9 miles at the Pondicherry Division.</li> <li>When compatible, allow for professionally guided wildlife observation tours and photography seminars, subject to special use permits.</li> <li>Evaluate all existing and proposed refuge infrastructure to provide access to those with disabilities.</li> <li>At the more northerly Divisions, create pull-offs along plowed public roads to allow greater winter access for pedestrians.</li> <li>Host a Big Sit at refuge divisions and other opportunities for visitors to get involved in refuge research and monitoring projects (e.g., bird banding, woodcock surveys).</li> </ul>

Resource or Program Features	<b>Alternative A</b> <b>Current Management (No change from 1995 Final EIS, as amended)</b>	<b>Alternative B</b> <b>Consolidated Stewardship (Within Existing, Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative C</b> <b>Enhanced Conservation Connections and Partnerships (Service-preferred Alternative) (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative D</b> <b>Reduced Management with Emphasis on Backcountry Recreation (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>
<b>Objective 3.3 Wildlife Observation and Photography</b>	Support quality, public opportunities to observe and photograph wildlife in a variety of natural habitats in the Connecticut River watershed in order to connect a broad spectrum of people with nature.			
<b>Aids to Support Wildlife Observation and Photography on Refuge Lands</b>	<b>On Refuge Lands</b> Continue to provide variety of resources such as interpretive signs, brochures, flyers, and wildlife checklists to visitors at visitor contact points, the refuge Web site, and from refuge staff.	<b>Within CPAs</b> <i>Work with partners to develop materials to promote wildlife observation and photography opportunities, such as brochures, maps, Web-based information, and On Refuge Lands</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• information and applications for mobile phones and devices.</li> <li>• Develop species lists and a map of key wildlife viewing areas on refuge lands and distribute them at refugee kiosks and website.</li> <li>• Work with partners to identify "Birding Hotspot" locations throughout the watershed with publications and signage.</li> <li>• Host wildlife identification and photography workshops at refuge facilities.</li> <li>• Where appropriate, develop tools such as phone apps, QR codes, E-bird sites, etc. at kiosks, visitor contact points, and partner facilities that inform visitors about CPA-based wildlife observation opportunities.</li> <li>• Loan "birding backpacks", containing binoculars, field guides, checklists, etc. to the public at refuge visitor facilities.</li> </ul>	<b>Not addressed in 1995 FEIS.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote the Connecticut River Birding Trail by offering the existing guides at refuge and partner facilities.</li> <li>• Support extension of the Birding Trail to include Massachusetts and Connecticut.</li> <li>• Provide a link to the Birding Trail via the refuge's website and work with the publisher to create a fully digital guide and aid in the transition to a paperless format.</li> <li>• Work with partners to develop and publish a list/map of key wildlife viewing areas on surrounding lands.</li> <li>• Promote the Connecticut River Byway by providing its informational materials at refuge facilities and providing a link via the refuge's website.</li> </ul>	
<b>Watershed-based Initiatives to Support Wildlife Observation and Photography</b>				

Resource or Program Features	<b>Alternative A</b> <u>Current Management</u> (No change from 1995 Final EIS, as amended)	<b>Alternative B</b> <u>Consolidated Stewardship</u> (Within Existing, Approved Acquisition Authority)	<b>Alternative C</b> <u>Enhanced Conservation Connections and Partnerships (Service-preferred Alternative)</u> (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)	<b>Alternative D</b> <u>Reduced Management with Emphasis on Backcountry Recreation</u> (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)
<b>Objective 3.4 Other Recreational/Activities</b> <p>Support non-priority, outdoor recreational opportunities and public access that provide quality, nature-based experiences throughout the Connecticut River watershed to facilitate and improve community relationships, raise awareness and an appreciation for conserving natural resources, and garner support for the National Wildlife Refuge System.</p>	<b>Regional Water-based Trail Initiatives and Opportunities</b> <p><i>Off and On Refuge Lands</i>            Currently, there are access points along sections of the Connecticut River maintained by the states and private organizations such as the Upper Valley Land Trust and Vermont River Conservancy.</p>	<b>Off and On CPAs</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assist Connecticut River Paddlers' Trail to complete a continuous network of launches and campsites so that the trail is fully functional for its 410-mile length, including the siting of trail infrastructure on refuge lands when appropriate and compatible.</li> <li>• Publicize the Connecticut River Paddlers' Trail on the refuge's web page, and write letters in support of grant funding.</li> <li>• Work with state, local, and other conservation partners to identify at least six appropriate sites in each watershed state in order to improve direct public access to the Connecticut River and its major tributaries for the purpose of site-appropriate boating, fishing, and wildlife observation.</li> <li>• Expand partnership with Northern Forest Canoe Trail to enhance the visitor experience.</li> </ul>	<b>On Refuge Lands</b> <p>Alternative B and C are the same, except that opportunities may increase under alternative C due to the larger refuge land base.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On refuge lands, maintain a relevance to the larger recreational community and provide opportunities for non-traditional users to experience refuge resources by promoting regional water-based trails, such as the Connecticut River Paddlers' Trail and Northern Forest Canoe Trail.</li> <li>• Work with the Northern Forest Canoe Trail to provide a campsite and access point for paddlers at the Nulhegan Basin Division.</li> </ul>	<b>Within CPAs</b> Same as alternatives B and C. <b>On Refuge Lands</b> <p>No new access points or campsites on existing or newly acquired refuge lands; otherwise support the use and enjoyment of the Connecticut River Paddler's Trail and Northern Forest Canoe Trail.</p>

Resource or Program Features	<b>Alternative A</b> <b>Current Management (No change from 1995 Final EIS, as amended)</b>	<b>Alternative B</b> <b>Consolidated Stewardship (Within Existing, Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative C</b> <b>Enhanced Conservation Connections and Partnerships (Service-preferred Alternative) (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative D</b> <b>Reduced Management with Emphasis on Backcountry Recreation (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>
<b>Objective 3.4 Other Recreational/Activities</b>				
Support non-priority, outdoor recreational opportunities and public access that provide quality, nature-based experiences throughout the Connecticut River watershed to facilitate and improve community relationships, raise awareness and an appreciation for conserving natural resources, and garner support for the National Wildlife Refuge System.				

Resource or Program Features	<b>Alternative A</b> <b>Current Management (No change from 1995 Final EIS, as amended)</b>	<b>Alternative B</b> <b>Consolidated Stewardship (Within Existing, Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative C</b> <b>Enhanced Conservation Connections and Partnerships (Service-preferred Alternative) (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative D</b> <b>Reduced Management with Emphasis on Backcountry Recreation (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>
<b>Objective 3.4 Other Recreational/Activities</b> Support non-priority, outdoor recreational opportunities and public access that provide quality, nature-based experiences throughout the Connecticut River watershed to facilitate and improve community relationships, raise awareness and an appreciation for conserving natural resources, and garner support for the National Wildlife Refuge System.	<b>Other Recreational Opportunities that Enhance Visitor Use and Enjoyment of Refuge Lands</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to allow other, compatible recreational opportunities in designated locations on existing refuge divisions and units, such as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Petwalking.</li> <li>* Boating in designated waterbodies.</li> <li>* Bicycles and automobiles on designated roads.</li> <li>• As new refuge lands are acquired, determine if these uses are compatible.</li> <li>• Continue to allow snowmobiling on designated routes on the Nulhegan Basin, Pondicherry, and Dead Branch Divisions.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<b>On Refuge Lands</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In addition to alternative A: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer virtual geocaching opportunities to help interpret refuge resources.</li> <li>• When compatible, allow commercial guiding in support of the six priority public uses by special use permit.</li> <li>• When compatible, allow recreational gathering of blueberries, blackberries, strawberries, raspberries, mushrooms, fiddleheads, and antler sheds.</li> <li>• Require pets to be on leash at all times.</li> <li>• Open to bicycling Nulhegan Basin Division roads that are also open to motor vehicles.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<b>On Refuge Lands</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For non-motorized uses, same as alternative A. However, scale back use of motorized vehicles on refuge divisions and units, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discontinue snowmobiling on the refuge.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

Resource or Program Sub-objectives	Alternative A <b>Current Management (No change from 1995 Final EIS, as amended)</b>	Alternative B <b>Consolidated Stewardship (Within Existing, Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	Alternative C <b>Enhanced Conservation Connections and Partnerships (Service-preferred Alternative) (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	Alternative D <b>Reduced Management with Emphasis on Backcountry Recreation (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>
<b>Goal 4 Partnerships.</b>	Enhance the conservation, protection, and stewardship of natural and cultural resources, and promote wildlife-dependent recreation, throughout the Connecticut River Watershed by initiating, supporting, and promoting partnerships with other Federal, State, and local agencies, Tribal governments, and private organizations.			
<b>Objective 4.1: Strategic Habitat Conservation Partnerships</b>	Create, enhance, and facilitate partnerships to plan, design, deliver, and evaluate Strategic Habitat Conservation in the Connecticut River watershed, with an emphasis on promoting action in CPAs. Special effort will be made to coordinate with the North Atlantic LCC partnership, the four State fish and wildlife agencies, and other partners advancing conservation in the watershed.			
<b>Habitat Restoration and Management</b>	Continue to support existing habitat conservation partnerships.	<p><i>Within CPAs</i></p> <p>Continue to work with habitat conservation partners throughout the Connecticut River Watershed, with priority attention to CPAs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with partners and willing landowners to restore, manage, and enhance habitats for Federal trust resources and other species of conservation concern. Priorities include:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Restoration of riparian and floodplain habitat along the Connecticut River main stem and tributaries.</li> <li>* Removing barriers to aquatic passage, especially for migratory fish.</li> <li>* Restoring wetland functions and values.</li> <li>* Protecting federally listed species.</li> <li>* Treating invasive species that threaten important habitats.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		
<b>Private Lands Coordination</b>	As funding allows, continue existing private lands coordination program.	<p><i>Within CPAs</i></p> <p>Enhance the refuge's private land coordination program to help complement private landowner assistance among the four States, NRCS, the Forest Service, and other conservation agencies. Priorities include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with landowners to find grant opportunities and submit grant applications.</li> <li>• Share scientific information and best management practices.</li> </ul>		

Resource or Program Sub-objectives	<b>Alternative A</b> <b>Current Management (No change from 1995 Final EIS, as amended)</b>  <b>Land Protection</b> Continue to acquire refuge lands in SFAs.	<b>Alternative B</b> <b>Consolidated Stewardship (Within Existing, Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>  <i>Within CFAs</i> Support partners' efforts to acquire land of high importance to species and habitats, and/or that support the Connecticut Landscape Conservation Design.	<b>Alternative C</b> <b>Enhanced Conservation Connections and Partnerships (Service-preferred Alternative) (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>  <i>Within CPAs</i> Pursue from willing sellers only, acquisition of those lands identified in approved land protection plan. Actions taken would complement other partners' land conservation efforts and support the Connecticut Landscape Conservation Design.	<b>Alternative D</b> <b>Reduced Management with Emphasis on Backcountry Recreation (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>  <i>Within CPAs</i> Enhance existing and build new partnerships to conserve federally threatened, endangered, and Federal candidate terrestrial species throughout the watershed, with priority attention to CPAs, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate with Federal and State agencies, local towns, nongovernmental organizations, and willing landowners.</li> <li>• Work with others to develop and implement species recovery plans, State WAPS, and other conservation measures with a goal to avoid new species listings. Measures may include land protection, public use and access management, and invasive species control.</li> </ul> <i>Within CFAs</i> Complement partners' land conservation efforts by acquiring additional refuge lands within CFAs to protect important habitats for federally listed species.
<b>Federally Listed Terrestrial Species Conservation</b> Continue to support existing federally threatened, endangered, and Federal candidate terrestrial species partnerships.	<i>Within CPAs</i> Enhance existing and build new partnerships to conserve migratory bird partnerships throughout the watershed, with a special focus on CPAs, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting migratory bird ecoregional plans and priorities developed through the NALCC including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Population monitoring, assessment, and management.</li> <li>* Habitat restoration, management, and protection.</li> <li>* Private lands coordination and grants writing and funding support</li> <li>* Communications and outreach.</li> <li>* Recreational opportunities.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>			
<b>Migratory Bird Conservation</b> Continue to support existing migratory bird partnerships.				

Resource or Program Sub-objectives	<b>Alternative A</b> <b>Current Management (No change from 1995 Final EIS, as amended)</b>	<b>Alternative B</b> <b>Consolidated Stewardship (Within Existing, Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative C</b> <b>Enhanced Conservation Connections and Partnerships (Service-preferred Alternative) (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>	<b>Alternative D</b> <b>Reduced Management with Emphasis on Backcountry Recreation (Includes Expanding the Refuge's Approved Acquisition Authority)</b>
<b>Other Terrestrial Species of Conservation Concern Identified by the Service, NALCC Partnership, or States</b>	Continue to support other existing partnerships that address other terrestrial species of conservation concern.	<i>Within CPAs</i>	Enhance existing and build new partnerships to conserve other terrestrial species of conservation concern throughout the watershed, with priority attention to CPAs, including working with partners to develop and implement conservation programs.	
	<b>Objective 4.3 Aquatic Species Protection, Restoration, and Management Partnerships</b>			
	<b>Federally Listed Aquatic Species Conservation</b>	Continue to support existing federally threatened, endangered, and Federal candidate species partnerships.	<i>Within CPAs</i> Enhance existing and build new partnerships to conserve federally threatened, endangered, and Federal candidate aquatic species throughout the watershed, with priority attention to CPAs, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate with Federal and State agencies, local towns, NGOs, and willing landowners.</li> <li>• Work with others to develop and implement species recovery plans, State WAPS, and other conservation measures with a goal to avoid new species listings. Measures may include land protection, public use and access management, and invasive species control.</li> </ul>	
	<b>Other Aquatic Species of Conservation Concern Identified by the Service, the NALCC Partnership, or States</b>	Continue to support other existing partnerships that address other aquatic species of conservation concern.	<i>Within CPAs</i> Enhance existing and build new partnerships to conserve other aquatic species of conservation concern throughout the watershed, with priority attention to CPAs, including working with partners to develop and implement conservation programs. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with others to remove barriers to aquatic species passage (e.g., dam removal and culvert replacement).</li> <li>• Work with others to restore native species; work together to identify, prioritize, seek funding, implement, and monitor success of projects.</li> </ul>	

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<b>Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas and Other Invasive Species Partnerships</b>	<p>Continue to work with existing invasive species partners, including the six CISMAS and other local watershed groups to control and prevent the spread of invasive species.</p>	<p>Within CPAs:</p> <p>Work with partners to develop a framework for invasive species control at all levels within the watershed, including watershed-wide, in subwatersheds, and at local levels. The goal is to create an organization that would result in on-the-ground invasive species inventories, monitoring, education, and management activities in priority habitats. Specifically, we would:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take a leadership role in forming and administering a watershed-wide, partnership-based invasive species management program using the CISMA model. Apply for Federal funds to run this "umbrella CISMA" and distribute funds to the smaller groups to complete projects.</li> <li>• Work with existing partners to develop invasive species management objectives and strategies.</li> <li>• Help develop invasive species partnerships in CPAs where none currently exist.</li> </ul>		
	<b>Objective 4.3 Aquatic Species Protection, Restoration, and Management Partnerships</b>	<p>Support the conservation of migratory fish and other aquatic species of conservation concern by collaborating with Federal and State agencies, local towns, and non-governmental organizations in the implementation of fish and other aquatic species conservation plans.</p>		
	<b>Invasive Species Outreach</b>	<p>Continue current levels of outreach on invasive species.</p>	<p>Provide target audiences and concerned citizens with the information they need to take meaningful actions to control or prevent species spread on their own lands or through their recreational and/or professional activities. Specifically, we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educate the public about the importance of each person doing their part and supply them with the information to take wise action.</li> <li>• Inform those who manage extensive amounts of vegetation and/or transport soils as part of their job duties about the potential transmission of invasive plants, and provide them with operational Best Management Practices (BMPs).</li> <li>• Prioritize actions by considering which species are of highest threat to biodiversity, are threatening rare species, or can most successfully be eradicated; as well as which areas are especially important to restore due to important natural resources; educate partners and public about these priorities.</li> <li>• Help groups successfully plan and implement volunteer control days in their communities for plants that are easy to control by hand such as garlic mustard.</li> </ul>	

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<b>Objective 4.4 Invasive Species Management and Other Invasive Species Partnerships</b>	Plan and implement coordinated and strategic actions among conservation partners and private landowners to reduce the ecological threat from invasive or exotic plants and wildlife species in the Connecticut River watershed. Work with those partners to design and implement strategies for controlling the spread of established invaders, preventing new invasions, and in the early detection and rapid response to control new invaders.	<b>Early Detection and Rapid Response Control</b>  Continue to work with partners and volunteers to control water chestnut in waterbodies throughout the watershed.	<b>Objective 4.4 Invasive Species Management and Other Invasive Species Partnerships</b>  Plan and implement coordinated and strategic actions among conservation partners and private landowners to reduce the ecological threat from invasive or exotic plants and wildlife species in the Connecticut River watershed. Work with those partners to design and implement strategies for controlling the spread of established invaders, preventing new invasions, and in the early detection and rapid response to control new invaders.	<b>Objective 4.4 Invasive Species Management and Other Invasive Species Partnerships</b>  Plan and implement coordinated and strategic actions among conservation partners and private landowners to reduce the ecological threat from invasive or exotic plants and wildlife species in the Connecticut River watershed. Work with those partners to design and implement strategies for controlling the spread of established invaders, preventing new invasions, and in the early detection and rapid response to control new invaders.
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Become more actively involved with the Northeast Aquatic Nuisance Species Panel.</li> <li>• Work with the State invasive species groups to develop lists of potential invasive species that would pose serious threats to biodiversity if they became established in the watershed and develop a protocol for early detection and rapid response. Focus, first on priority species already known to be in New England such as zebra mussel, Asian longhorn beetle, hemlock wooly adelgid, emerald ash borer, mute swan, hydrilla, mile-a-minute vine, and Japanese stiltgrass.</li> <li>• Continue water chestnut spread control actions by assisting to find funds for large populations, leading groups to hand-pull smaller populations, and inspecting other water bodies for this species. Locate groups willing to "adopt a water body for water chestnut control" to further refuge efforts.</li> </ul>	
			<b>Invasive Species Inventories and Mapping</b>  Continue to work with existing invasive species partners, including the six CISMAS and other local watershed groups to control and prevent the spread of invasive species.	<b>Invasive Species Inventories and Mapping</b>  Continue to work with existing invasive species partners, including the six CISMAS and other local watershed groups to control and prevent the spread of invasive species.

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<b>Objective 4.5 Special Designation Area Partnerships</b>	Support existing Federal and State designated special areas, and work with partners and willing landowners to promote additional designations that enhance the protection and/or recognition of natural, cultural, and recreational resources of significance within CPAs.			
<b>Eligibility and Monitoring</b>	Continue to support existing special designations in the watershed and on the refuge.	<p><i>Within CPAs</i></p> <p>Work cooperatively with others throughout the watershed, with priority attention to CPAs, to promote special designations that benefit natural, cultural, and recreational resources, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with partners throughout the watershed to share information with willing landowners on the benefits of and eligibility requirements for special designation areas.</li> <li>• Work with partners and willing landowners to establish a monitoring program, or implement ones already developed, and pool resources to accomplish that monitoring, in an effort to ensure that the special designation areas maintain their characteristics.</li> </ul>		
<b>Objective 4.6 Research and Demonstration Partnerships, Particularly in Support of Climate Change Adaptation</b>	Create, enhance, or facilitate partnerships that advance conservation research in the Connecticut River watershed, leveraging resources among partners, with an emphasis on advancing our understanding of climate change and land use impacts and pursuing adaptation strategies in response, to ensure the long-term sustainability of native fish, wildlife, plants, and associated habitats found in the CPAs.		<p><i>Within CPAs</i></p> <p>Work with partners to conduct research and demonstration projects to address climate change throughout the watershed, with priority attention to CPAs. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote research and development of applied management practices to sustain and enhance the natural and cultural resources.</li> <li>• Seek opportunities that engage research institutions and organizations such as universities and colleges and NGOs.</li> <li>• Primarily working through the NALCC partnership, develop, implement, and support cooperative research programs that address priority conservation and management needs or which provide basic information on species populations, their habitat needs, and response to climate change.</li> <li>• Encourage opportunities on the refuge for research, inventory and monitoring, and the demonstration of management practices.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Within CPAs</i></p> <p>Work with other partners to inventory and monitor resources of conservation concern throughout the watershed, with priority attention to CPAs. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote the efforts of the NALCC partnership to identify common inventory and monitoring needs and help the LCC with sharing resources to accomplish priority work.</li> <li>• Support the Service's LMRD and the inventory and monitoring priorities identified for the watershed.</li> </ul>

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<b>Objective 4.6 Research and Demonstration Partnerships, Particularly in Support of Climate Change Adaptation</b>  Create, enhance, or facilitate partnerships that advance conservation research in the Connecticut River watershed, leveraging resources among partners, with an emphasis on advancing our understanding of climate change and land use impacts and pursuing adaptation strategies in response, to ensure the long-term sustainability of native fish, wildlife, plants, and associated habitats found in the CPAs.			<p><b>Climate Science and Adaptation</b></p> <p>Not addressed in 1995 FEIS.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with partners at the Federal, State, and local levels to identify and address climate change threats to fish, wildlife, and habitats throughout the watershed, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encouraging communities in the watershed to plan to minimize the impacts of climate and land use changes and to conserve ecosystem services benefits.</li> <li>Promoting the work of the NALCC to model land use and climate change and the projected impacts on fish, wildlife, and habitats.</li> <li>Encouraging and supporting the restoration of floodplain forests and riparian buffers to protect public and private property from increased incidents of severe weather events, and any actions that would improve water quality in rivers and streams.</li> <li>Supporting the work of the Northeast Climate Science Center to help provide scientific information, tools, and techniques to help anticipate, monitor, and adapt to climate change.</li> <li>Working with other Service programs to develop, and share information with partners about, best practices for climate change adaptation.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>Objective 4.7 Community-based Partnerships</b>   Create, enhance, or facilitate partnerships within watershed communities that enhance the Service's ability to make positive contributions to civic life and local economies, and enrich community connections to a healthy, vibrant watershed (see objective 4.8 for those partnerships specifically dedicated to education, interpretation, and recreation).</p> <p><b>Economic Vitality within the Watershed</b></p> <p>Continue existing community-based partnerships.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work to enhance the economic vitality of communities in the Connecticut River watershed through nature-based and ecotourism initiatives, agriculture and forest protection programs, and recreational activities that both advance strategic conservation and improve broad-based visitation to the refuge.</li> <li>Meet with local community officials and leaders to establish how the Service can make a positive contribution to local economies consistent with the Service and Refuge System missions, and refuge purposes where refuge lands are involved. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communicate with local businesses when refuge staff are awarding contracts that have the potential for economic opportunity, including timber harvest, and construction and maintenance activities.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

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<b>Objective 4.7 Community-based Partnerships</b>				
Create, enhance, or facilitate partnerships within watershed communities that enhance the Service's ability to make positive contributions to civic life and local economies, and enrich community connections to a healthy, vibrant watershed (see objective 4.8 for those partnerships specifically dedicated to education, interpretation, and recreation).		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As appropriate, support the protection, management, and restoration of cultural resources in the Connecticut River watershed and promote opportunities to connect people to the area's rich history. Identify and develop working partnerships with academic institutions, museums, and tribal governments with the goal of identification, protection, and interpretation of historic and cultural resources, particularly land-based or archaeological features. The refuge will not lead on projects involving the acquisition, restoration, and interpretation of historic structures, but where practical and appropriate on such projects within CFAs that include a significant land protection component, we will work to be an effective partner in the overall protection effort.</li> </ul>	<i>Within CPAs</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Institute regular meetings (e.g., annual meetings, twice annual listening stations, etc.) with community leaders and citizens to make the refuge more relevant and connected to communities.</li> <li>Make refuge buildings available for community meetings and events. Consider opportunities to provide office space to State natural resource and other conservation partners in order to better serve the public interest. Share maintenance equipment and other resources with a wide range of partners when possible.</li> <li>Establish partnerships with local and State law enforcement agencies to benefit both communities and the refuge. Enter into mutual aid agreements to share personnel and equipment.</li> </ul>	
<b>Historic and Cultural Resources</b>				
<b>Community Outreach, Shared Facilities, and Public Safety Resources</b>	Continue current level of community outreach.		<i>Within CPAs</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employ a wide variety of agreement types to facilitate projects and other opportunities advancing conservation, environmental education, and recreation goals shared with partners in local communities.</li> <li>Ensure the most appropriate agreement is created for each opportunity given expected outcomes and responsibilities. For example, encourage easements to provide additional public access or manage habitats, or to protect important habitat from land development.</li> <li>We may pursue low or no-cost leases to facilitate the construction of capital improvements such as Conte Corner installations, boardwalks, trails, and interpretive kiosks.</li> </ul>	
<b>Easements, Leases, Cooperative Agreements, and Special Use Permits</b>		Continue existing easements, leases, cooperative agreements, and special use permits.		
<b>Constituent Organizations</b>		Continue existing relationships with constituent organizations (e.g., bird clubs, sportsperson clubs, etc.).	<i>Within CPAs</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote relationships with bird clubs, outdoor recreation and sportsperson's clubs, and other constituent organizations to encourage their involvement in refuge management and to build support.</li> </ul>	

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<b>Objective 4.8 Educational and Interpretation Partnerships</b>	In conjunction with the strategies described under Goal 2—Environmental Education, Interpretation, and Outreach, above—coordinate our educational, outreach, and interpretive conservation programs with those of our partner agencies and organizations so that a consistent public message fosters respect for the natural world and gets more people motivated to promote conservation in their daily lives.			
<b>Environmental Education and Interpretation Partnerships</b>	Continue to support environmental education and interpretation partnerships.	<b>Within CPAs</b> Enhance existing and build new partnerships to develop and provide high-quality environmental education and interpretive programs, with priority attention in CPAs, including:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with each of the four State environmental education program coordinators to identify effective education programs, to integrate curriculums where appropriate, and to promote consistent standards of excellence for educational programs offered in the watershed.</li> <li>• Working with education partners to develop and deliver integrated interpretive messages about natural, cultural, and historic resources of the Connecticut River watershed.</li> <li>• Contribute interpretive information regarding the refuge to partner programs.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue and enhance shared environmental education and interpretation facilities that are effective in reaching a wide and diverse demographic with consistent and productive messages about the refuge and the Service's contribution to conservation in the watershed. Continue to seek new opportunities for partnerships.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<b>Objective 4.9 Recreation Partnerships to Connect People with the Outdoors</b>	Work with partners to promote and provide outdoor recreational opportunities in the watershed that facilitates connecting people with nature in a meaningful way, and encourages those connections over their lifetimes. Promote the development of a landscape-based recreation strategy within the watershed to connect, protect, and enhance a network of aquatic and terrestrial trails.		<b>Within CPAs</b> Work cooperatively with other Federal and State partners throughout the watershed, with priority attention to CPAs, to plan and implement recreational opportunities.	
<b>Federal and State Agency Strategic Recreation Plans</b>	Continue to support existing recreational partnerships.			

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<b>Objective 4.9 Recreation Partnerships to Connect People with the Outdoors</b>				
Work with partners to promote and provide outdoor recreational opportunities in the watershed that facilitates connecting people with nature in a meaningful way, and encourages those connections over their lifetimes. Promote the development of a landscape-based recreation strategy within the watershed to connect, protect, and enhance a network of aquatic and terrestrial trails.				
<b>Making Connections Outdoors</b>	Continue to support existing recreational partnerships.	<p><i>Within CPAs</i></p> <p>Coordinate with other Federal and State agencies, educational and recreational organization and user groups to promote activities that connect people with the outdoors, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help sustain regional trails that connect people with nature, such as the Northern Forest Canoe Trail, Connecticut River Birding Trail, Connecticut River Paddlers' Trail, and the "Source to the Sea" birding trail.</li> <li>• Engage with partners to develop concept plans, interpretive materials, and conduct inventories of infrastructure to support these trails and initiatives.</li> </ul>		
<b>Objective 4.10 Friends Groups</b>				
Develop and nurture active and vibrant Friends groups through formal, strategic support programs, and by strengthening communication, collaboration, and cooperation. Include them as full partners in the mission delivery of the refuge and the Refuge System. Implement national guidance on mentoring Friends groups designed to ensure each group's effectiveness in supporting the refuge, as well as to provide training and organizational resources, and encourage networking among Friends groups across the Refuge System. Provide guidance to partners who want to create Friends groups on other ownerships.				
<b>Friends Groups</b>	Continue to support existing Friends groups, including the Friends of Conte Refuge, Friends of Pondicherry, Friends of Nulhegan Basin Division, Friends of Salmon River, and Friends of the Great Falls Discovery Center.	<p><i>In addition to alternative A:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance support for refuge Friends groups.</li> <li>• Develop, promote, and support development of Friends groups for other refuge divisions and units.</li> <li>• Formalize each refuge Friends group through a written agreement.</li> <li>• Encourage Friends groups to pursue non-profit status (501(c) 3 organization status).</li> <li>• Provide resources to conservation partners interested in establishing a Friends group on other ownerships.</li> </ul>		

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<b>Objective 4.11 Intergovernmental/Partnerships</b>	<p>Pursue strategic and synergistic intergovernmental partnerships at all levels of government to achieve specific, shared, and compatible landscape-level goals for conservation, education, and recreation within the watershed. Work within existing Federal and State programs to the full extent possible to help leverage funding and staff resources, information, and expertise among public and private partners. Formalize agreements through Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs), Memorandums of Agreement (MOAs), or other written, intergovernmental agreements, as warranted, when the identification of roles, responsibilities, and measures of success would enhance the likelihood of successful implementation.</p>	<p><i>In addition to alternative A:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek opportunities, to the extent possible, to share financial and staff resources, information, expertise, etc.</li> <li>• Work with partners to monitor and evaluate existing MOUs and MOAs prior to their renewal; continue, modify, or discontinue agreements as warranted.</li> </ul>	<p><i>In addition to alternative A:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek opportunities, where possible, to share financial and staff resources, information, expertise, and otherwise leverage multi-agency investments in the watershed to accomplish shared goals and attract other investors.</li> <li>• Utilize the AGOs framework to catalyze and bolster local, community-driven conservation efforts and demonstrate how a strong Federal agency partnership can more effectively align, target, and leverage public resources across the watershed to accomplish shared goals and objectives.</li> </ul>	
	<b>Multiagency or Public-Private Partnerships</b>	<p>Continue to support existing MOUs and other multiagency and public-private partnership agreements to meet refuge goals, the Refuge System mission, and other shared conservation priorities in the watershed.</p>	<p>Continue to engage other Federal agencies in shared conservation goals for the watershed, and to enhance the implementation of Federal programs through partnerships.</p>	
	<b>Federal Agency Coordination</b>			